

KING PHILIP REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MINUTES
May 25, 2017 – 7PM
Plainville Council on Aging – Community Room
Plainville, Massachusetts

CALL TO ORDER:

Mr. Rose, Chair of the Plainville Board of Selectmen called the meeting to order at 7:04PM.
Mr. Francomano, Chair Pro Tem called the King Philip Regional School Committee meeting to order at 7:05PM

ROLL CALL OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Members Present: Norfolk: Mike Gee (via telephone), Kenneth Dow, Jeff Chalmers
Plainville: Samad Khan, Patrick Francomano, Charlene McEntee
Wrentham: Erin DeStefano, Jim Killion

Members Absent: Norfolk: Present
Wrentham: Trevor Knott
Plainville: Present

The meeting was televised by Plainville Comcast and by the Plainville Fire Chief to be viewed on Utube.

Plainville Members Present:

Plainville Finance: Bruce Cates, Chairman, Shannon MacKenzie, Elizabeth Nowkowski, Jessie Wright, James Blasé, Joseph Ferney, Brian Kelly
Plainville Selectmen: Rob Rose, Chairman, George Sutherland, Matthew Kavanah

Jennifer Thompson, Plainville Town Administrator gave a PowerPoint presentation of the Plainville FY18 budget. Major Revenue Categories were reviewed and Ms. Thompson noted that there is a 2.5% limit in which the Plainville real estate property tax can be raised each year or \$493,000.

Major Expense Categories were reviewed.

- How to Balance the Budget: Estimated revenues less budget requests equals an estimated balance.
- King Philip is the biggest expenses for Plainville.
- There was a joint finance meeting with selectmen and finance committees with all 3 towns and the King Philip Regional School Committee on 4/24/17 with the focus being on King Philip budget, with scenarios in town assessments being reviewed. Discussion at this meeting was the use of free cash as this was a unique year for King Philip.
- King Philip’s May 1, 2017 assessments and the impact of these new assessments was analyzed.

Ms. Thompson indicated that Plainville voted unanimously for a 3.224%. How this 3.224% will impact public safety was reviewed based upon population: For the Police Department, there are 2 officers on duty at night and the chief covers calls and shift coverages. There is a similar situation in the Fire Department, in which calls have doubled in the last few years. In order to staff the second ambulance, there needs to be coverage. At 3.0% scenario about 21 weeks out of the year understaffed. Administrative staff was reviewed.

Discussion was held on how to get to 4% which would save King Philip teachers totaling approximately \$229,000. Mr. Francomano explained that during a recent Budget & Finance Subcommittee meeting, discussion was held on Excess & Deficiency (E&D) funds that are to be certified in the fall; \$200,000 has been deferred and the total will come out of \$600,000.

Mr. Rose will have Mr. Sutherland read a statement, then the Plainville Finance Committee will be given the opportunity to speak and then to King Philip.

Mr. Sutherland read the following statement into the Minutes:

I want to thank everyone for coming out tonight. An active and engaged citizenry is required for there to be meaningful public discussion. I speak for myself, but I am confident that my observations, feelings and views will resonate strongly with the other members of our board.

Since our decision to support the "3%" increase I have heard from all sides of this issue. I have been called courageous and insightful but at the same time insensitive and vindictive. A normal day for any local office holder. I assure you that my intent and motives are sincere and are not driven by any agenda, but rather to fulfill the pledge I made when I took office, to do what is right for the almost 9000 citizens of the town I love. Incidentally, Pat Francomano and I have known each other for over 25 years and I count him as a friend as well as a great neighbor, so it is hardly personal.

To say this situation is fluid would be an understatement. What hasn't changed is the fact that the administration is not in control of the finances, information and general management of the district. From basic knowledge of staff counts to a true and honest accounting of proposed cuts or delayed projects, there is a basic lack of control of the administrative and fiscal domains within the KP District.

It has been clear from the outset that all cuts were intended to be at the instructional level, because they would have the most effect in the eyes of students, parents and some members of the public. Issues such as revenue enhancement, overtime, cell phones and a blossoming cost increase at the administrative level of the district were either ignored, or begrudgingly offered after intense pressure and scrutiny was applied. Bottom line, there is no evidence that the district can adequately attest to the true financial condition of the district. It is this fact that has only validated my belief that my vote was correct.

Sometimes the toughest thing to do is to say no. As adults, we know that it is tough to deny our children anything because our most basic desire is to give them everything they want and feel they need. We say no out of love and a knowledge that this will serve as a valuable life lesson.

Until the district can give an adequate accounting of the monies entrusted to it, by the taxpayers of Plainville, I once again must say no. For the people of this town to vote to increase funding now would be the classic case of "throwing good money after bad" and only validate Albert Einstein's famous quote "that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results". Repeatedly over the last ten or so years, we have supported the district, moreover, we have given monies from our stabilization fund three times in that period. The time has come to stop and take a step back and fix the problem and move forward. I pledge to you that I will work tirelessly with the district to put their fiscal and administrative house in order. It is the best interest of everyone that we make this happen before the 2019 budget cycle, as it will be a lot tighter than 2018.

The first step to fixing any issue is to acknowledge the existence of the problem. Stop the things that created the problem and then move swiftly to fix it. We know we have a problem, the time has come to fix it. Work with me to fix it!

Selectmen Matt Kavanah stated that he has studied KP budget for months and has received vague answers and that his position remains unchanged that the most fiscally responsible thing to do for FY18 is to advocate for no higher than a 3% increase, anything above that would jeopardize the finances of my town. We had been told that towns should look to their free cash, the town of Norfolk does not use all of its free cash nor does Wrentham. Plainville uses 100% of free cash to balance the budget and we broke that cycle last year and was long overdue and we need to continue or backtrack. I am not going to sit here and tell King Philip on how to do your job and the OPEB liability, other post-employment benefits, which is substantial and funding the rest of our operational budget we need to cover OPEB fund. Free cash and OPEB then advocating for 3% is slashing our departmental budgets. 2.8% of our local elementary district budget goes to help Plainville and King Philip.

Mr. Rose indicated that there is a structural problem as King Philip is getting a 10.7% increase that is totally unsustainable. This amount needs to be at 3.0 or below.

Finance Chair Bruce Cates: As the Advisory Committee to the town, we need to make sure our dollars are spent as wisely as possible and how we arrive at those recommendations. The process started in January when the King Philip issue came to light and the 3 towns came together in February which is a very collaborative thing to do. Also in February, King Philip school committee had a budget meeting prior to the public hearing. Plainville has had multiple finance meetings, met with KP school committee many times on how to make cuts, and met with selectmen many times.

A major concern is next year and the use of free cash. OPEB is \$1.5M each year added to our liability, \$1M is being added and putting in \$500,000. Snow removal finances and healthcare costs are increasing. That is why we cannot give KP the 22% increase that they are asking for. We offered 3.222%, and for the turf field, however, there is a pathway to 4% which I think what everyone is looking for to save teachers. Use E&D funds, not wise, it is the only way to get there.

Mr. Rob Rose, turned over the meeting to Mr. Francomano. The School Committee appreciates everyone's concerns and passion and it is great to have these discussions over the past several months. We are here to be collaborative and conciliatory to move forward. We need to address budgetary concerns and identify the best practices and long-range planning strategies, along with financial responsibility. Along those lines, the Budget & Finance Subcommittee plans to before July 1, hold round table discussions and invite and flush these ideas out and then return to the full school committee and discuss where we can go and what we can do.

Mr. Francomano continued that the path to success while, there are comparisons between E&D and a town's free cash, and there is a difference between a town and a regional school district. We do not have a stabilization fund and we turn to E&D to finance that. With that said, E&D is not certified until after the end of this fiscal year. At \$600,000, it is believed that if we add \$100,000 plus \$200,000, couple with anticipated savings from healthcare redesign completed within the 45 days, we should come close to bridging the gap between the 3.2% and 4%.

Discussion ensued on reductions by getting to 4% and the 4 HS positions would be restored. This would leave the loss of 2 MS academic positions, a HS assistant principal and the district technology coordinator.

Mr. Francomano indicated that at the 6pm King Philip Regional School Committee meeting, the committee voted to defer an additional \$100,000 and to fund the total of \$300,000 out of E&D in order to bridge that gap. The other issue noted was reference to a letter that was sent to Superintendent Zielinski from the KPTA re a number of areas where they thought where savings could be had. Mr. Francomano turned over the meeting to Dr. Zielinski so she could address those items.

Dr. Zielinski was asked by the School Committee to review the content of a letter from the KPTA dated May 24, 2017 and to address its content. The letter suggested reductions in the District and Administrative levels, such as the two positions of HR and Payroll Director, as previously this job was handled by one person. This would create a significant savings to the District. Dr. Zielinski explained that while it is true that we did with no backup of payroll or benefits for many years, with the additional state requirements for filing we could not handle the amount of work coming through our office and also the towns have their own HR offices set up. Dr. Zielinski referred to the MASBO operational report provided to the District which indicated that combining these positions is not feasible. Discussion ensued on why there are two directors in the same department and Dr. Zielinski explained that the director is a title only, they each cross train and the payroll individual has an accounting degree which is a position that we have been asked to provide based upon MASBO report.

Reference was made in the letter of the 2 retirees in which Dr. Zielinski explained that those positions are no longer in the budget.

Reference was made to the Assistant Supt for Curriculum. Dr. Zielinski explained that Dr. Gilson, who holds this title, is also the MS principal and is one person doing the job of 2 people. The current salary is 2 separate line items and is not the same as what was identified in the letter.

Dr. Zielinski explained that the position of data specialist a required position by the state and support to the HS guidance with data and analysis of colleges, etc.

Dr. Zielinski referred to the Technology position and explained that the previous technology director took another position and then the technology director and network administrator is now a combined position. The student help desk is a course

at the HS not an employee of the district, but an unpaid internship. There are currently 4 position in technology along with data specialist serving both schools, with a ticketing system in place.

The parking attendant position could be looked at by reducing the amount of time, according to Dr. Zielinski. This position does not generate revenue but ensures that parking is paid out of the revolving account.

With reference to the Transitions Coordinator and Out of District Coordinator, Dr. Zielinski explained that these positions save the district money by putting students in the appropriate placement. These individuals do evaluations, and work to bring students back from out of district placements. These positions were highlighted in the Walkers Report as part of the Special Education Review. Without these essential positions, you may see an increase in special education costs.

Smart Phones are issued to administrators as members of public safety and other key positions within the district. Mr. Francomano indicated that with that said, we should be looking at the bills and ensure that they are not abused. The Budget & Finance Subcommittee will definitely take a look at that and indicated that they have recently moved to the state bid.

Dr. Zielinski explained that the District has cut administration and although they do not provide direct services to students, it will affect student services. Custodial overtime has been analyzed and adjustments will be made.

Mr. Francomano explained that the long and short of it, the path has been taken, we can save a substantial number of positions without impacting Plainville any further.

Rob Rose, it does sound like we have reach consensus.

Public Participation:

Discussion with audience members were addressed referencing attrition, the mock schedule at the HS and double studies.

Discussion ensued on how members of the community should reach out to Senator Ross and State Representative Dooley on funding for schools and state aid as the per pupil expenditure of \$30 per student is essential for King Philip to sustain programming.

Discussion ensued on the funding of a new Plainville town hall in the amount of \$35M. Ms. Thompson explained the process and how some of the funding will be alleviated through the gaming stabilization fund for large capital projects to build the town hall and public safety buildings and are on the town meeting warrant.

Discussion followed.

Discussion was held on student run clubs being cut from the budget. Dr. Zielinski explained that this will be looked at following the budget process. In the event that the clubs cannot run due to funding, perhaps we could look at volunteers. The question was asked whether the District would consider having students pay a fee to join the clubs. Mr. Francomano indicated that it is certainly something we can look at.

The question was asked if FY19 will be more challenging than this year, what is the long-term strategy to get costs under control, get revenue? Mr. Francomano explained that the Budget & Finance Subcommittee is going to have a round table discussion and look at budget issues and do some long-term forecasting and get ready for the next step and look at items collaboratively. Healthcare, salaries being paid and we will obtain some benchmarks and move on from there.

Discussion ensued on why Plainville does not pay down their debt. Kathleen Parker, Town Treasurer, explained that that is a timing matter as we do not make a lot of interest. We spent \$200K to design and bring forward big documents that we have promised this town for the capital items. \$34M will be presented on June 5 for 2 buildings that we desperately

need, propose to pay \$4M in cash, and borrow \$30M to pay it off in 20 years with the least amount of interest we can get on our bond rating. Now it is time to show the fire fighters, police the respect that they deserve.

Discussion ensued on having King Philip document this budget process formally and put on the KP website and put the new scenario with the new funding. It was requested to add to elementary districts, as a lot of parents are not yet at KP but at the elementary level. Discussion followed on what is an efficient way of reaching folks who are not yet at KP.

Discussion ensued on what is the status of Ms. Gavin's position at the HS and if her position is still eliminated and how her services will be covered. Dr. Zielinski explained that there is a reduction of a HS assistant principal and an instructional technologist which are the 2 administrative positions that have been reduced. The HS assistant principal assists with the administration of 504 plans which will become decentralized and revert back to each individual building and the remaining administrators will need to pick up some of these pieces, and evaluations.

Discussion ensued on what happens to any remaining funds from out of district placements and does that money get refunded to the towns? Mr. Francomano explained that any remaining funds will go into E&D and that is how it gets funded

Mr. Francomano explained that special education is a Pre-k to Age 22 level and we need to work collaboratively with the 3 towns to obtain a uniform level of services. Yes, we need to find out how to get it done and may have been addressed in the Walker Report.

The question was asked, how did we not know that these special education students are coming up?
Mr. Francomano explained that there was a communication issue.

ADJOURNMENT:

A Motion was made by Mr. Killion, seconded by Mrs. McEntee, to adjourn the King Philip Regional School Committee at 9:17pm. All in favor: Yes (8); No (0).

Mr. Rose adjourned the meeting at 9:17pm.

Respectfully submitted,

*Lisa B. Witkus
Secretary to the School Committee*